

A Successful First Assignment

The first assignment is significant for several reasons. When all goes well, it can serve to build confidence in the new role, position the employee for a successful start, and helps to establish productive interaction between the employee and his/her manager and coworkers.

To ensure that the first assignments is successful, consider the following to help set expectations and outcomes:

Explain the expected outcome(s) of the assignment.

- What will be the end result of the assignment? Will it be newly created or updated?
- What will the desired outcome look like? (Provide examples, if possible.)
- How will success be measured?

Clarify the importance of the outcome(s).

This will help the employee connect the assignment to the overall organization.

- Where do the results fit in the larger organizational picture? (Consider missions, goals, and priorities). This will help the employee understand the impact the job has on the organization.
- Who will benefit from the results (students, faculty, staff, alumni, external stakeholders, others)?

Describe the key features of the assignment.

- What actions or steps are required?
- What resources or resource limitations may apply?
- What are the deadlines? Will there be milestones to meet prior to the final deadline?
- What is the priority of the assignment for the employee?
- How will progress be monitored?

Define the level of authority the employee will exercise throughout the assignment.

- Should the employee carry out exact instructions?
- Should the employee bring recommendations to be decided by the manager?
- What recommendations should the manager and new hire decide together?
- If the new employee has the authority to make decisions, should he/she inform management before acting?
- Will the new employee have the authority to make decisions, act, and then inform management of the outcome?

Let the employee know who else will be involved in the assignment.

- Who can influence success?
- Who will the employee need to consult with? (Ensure that the employee knows how to contact any relevant individuals.)
- Who will the employee need to get resources from, if needed?

Identify potential issues, and determine how they will be addressed.

- What could possibly interrupt or stand in the way of success in this assignment?
- How should any potential issues be resolved?

In moving through this process, continue to check with the employee to ensure clear expectations are established and understood. Encourage questions and clarify what management will do to support the employee's success.

Following completion of the assignment, it is recommended that the manager debrief with the new employee to gain his/her perspective on what went well, and what may have been challenging. The conversation should also include the assignment's outcomes, as well as how his/her interaction with other employees went and what may have been done differently.